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Ref: A. BANGKOK 7802(05) B. BANGKOK 3798(05)

SUBJECT: ORANGUTAN ODYSSEYS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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11. Summary: A new wildlife anti-trafficking law enforcement network, the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) established by ASEAN member countries in December 2005 shows that governments in Southeast Asia are beginning to pay more attention to the multi-billion dollar illegal wildlife trade (Ref A). However, the following accounts of the fate of illegally trafficked orangutans in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia demonstrate that governments in the region often still fail to take the problem seriously. Although all the ASEAN countries have acceded to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which bans trade in orangutans, traffickers, importers, and politically-connected individuals who profit from the illegal orangutan trade continue to flaunt their activities with impunity. End summary.

Swift Action in Viet Nam...

12. In early July, a European couple staying at the Thanh Canh Hotel in Vietnam's Binh Duong Province near Ho Chi Minh City called an animal protection hotline run by a Vietnamese NGO, Wildlife at Risk (WAR), after seeing two young orangutans at a private zoo at the hotel. WAR's Dao Van Hoang informed the provincial forest police, and early in the morning of July 11, they raided the hotel and confiscated the orangutans.

13. Vietnamese authorities immediately notified the Government of Indonesia, where they believed the apes had originated. Indonesia sent Edwin Weik and Cheryl MacPherson of the NGO Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF) to Vietnam to inspect the animals and oversee their repatriation. Dao Van Hoang told the BOSF representatives, "It took only two weeks since we found the orangutans to complete all the necessary procedures to return them. The swift action of the authorities is praiseworthy."

...But Slow Movement in Indonesia

14. On July 24, the animals were flown from Ho Chi Minh City to Jakarta. Originally scheduled to be transported to Samboja Lestari Orangutan Rehabilitation Center following a required 33-day quarantine at facilities provided by Taman Safari International

(TSI, a private for-profit zoo located about 50 km from Jakarta), four months later, the animals are still being held at the zoo. In September, a consortium of international NGOs sent an open letter requesting the Indonesian government to immediately transfer the animals from TSI to the rehabilitation center.

¶15. Replying to an inquiry from Embassy Econoff on November 28, a BOSF representative in Jakarta said the process had been delayed due to lengthy administrative procedures at the Jakarta City Office of Natural Resource Conservation and because of the Lebaran holidays in October. She expected the transfer of the orangutans to take place during the first week of December.

¶16. TSI generally gets high marks for its facilities and operates a Sumatran Tiger Breeding Center as part of a global species survival plan overseen by the World Conservation Union, but its website advertises "entertaining and educational animal shows that we offer highlighting... orangutans and other animals." Schools in Indonesia were closed for the Lebaran holidays from October 23-29, but TSI has held the animals from July 24 until now, raising concerns about both the credibility of TSI and of Indonesia's commitment to orangutan repatriation efforts.

¶17. Back in Vietnam, police continue the investigation of the Thanh Canh Hotel owner, who has admitted that he paid the equivalent of USD 12,500 for the two orangutans, but charges have yet to be filed against him.

#### Unprecedented Numbers Repatriated from Thailand...

¶18. In Thailand, the Department of National Parks (DNP) took custody of 57 orangutans from Safari World, a private, for-profit zoo in Bangkok, in 2003. The owner of Safari World at first said the orangutans were the offspring of the nearly 100 orangutans he had procured legally before Thailand acceded to CITES in 1994. Later, in July 2005, the Vice President of Safari World told Regional

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Environmental Officer (REO) that the 57 orangutans had been given to the zoo by pet-owners who no longer wanted to keep them. He said Safari World was performing a "public service" by taking care of the apes (Ref B).

¶19. Seven weeks after REO's visit, the Safari World owner admitted to Thai officials that he had obtained the animals illegally. On the margins of the ASEAN-WEN meetings in Bangkok in April 2006, Thai and Indonesian officials agreed to repatriate the animals to Indonesia.

¶10. After several delays, repatriation finally occurred on November ¶22. Forty-eight apes were repatriated - an unprecedented number - which required expensive and complex logistics, including the use of an Indonesian Air Force C-130 transport plane and eight veterinarians who accompanied the animals on the journey from Khao Pratap Chang Wildlife Preserve 100 km southwest of Bangkok to Halim Air Force Base in Jakarta to the BOSF Nyaru Menteng Orangutan Rehabilitation Center on Borneo. Upon the apes' arrival at the Halim airport, a welcome by First Lady Kristiani Herawati Yudhoyono, the Minister of Forestry, the State Minister of Environment, Thailand's ambassador to Indonesia, and other officials ensured lavish media coverage and maximum political mileage.

#### ...But Effort Marred by Ludicrous Loan of Apes to a Zoo

¶11. Inexplicably, five of the original 57 orangutans were not repatriated because Thailand's DNP had "loaned" them to perform for patrons of the Chiang Mai Night Safari. In addition, the remaining four animals are reported to have died while in official custody at Khao Pratap Chang Wildlife Preserve since October 2005.

¶12. On November 21, the deputy director of the Night Safari told the Bangkok Post that the apes would be sent to Khao Pratap Chang the following day. On November 27, however, the DNP confirmed to REO by phone that the orangutans were still at the Night Safari in Chiang Mai. On November 29, the Director of the DNP, Dr. Schwann Tunhikorn, called REO to say that the five animals had arrived at

Khao Pratap Chang that morning, but that no date for repatriation to Indonesia had yet been set. The Director expressed incredulity, as well as some irritation, at the U.S. government's interest in the matter.

¶13. Meanwhile, although the criminal case officially remains open against Pin Kewkacha, the wealthy owner and CEO of Safari World who reportedly has ties to high-level Thai politicians, there is no indication that Thai prosecutors intend (or dare) to pursue the matter further.

#### Phnom Penh Politician's Pet

¶14. In June, Cambodia's Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) rescued an Orangutan being transported on a motorbike. The WRRT team immediately brought the animal, which was very sick - unable to walk and barely able to breathe - for veterinary treatment at the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center (PTWRC). Both WRRT and PTWRC are supported in part by funds from USAID.

¶15. The PTWRC veterinarian along with a WRRT wildlife specialist team provided the best medical care, but it was too late and the animal died three days later. The autopsy showed severely damaged lungs and completely blocked up intestines (due to inappropriate feeding of rice).

¶16. Cambodian Member of Parliament Nhim Vanda, a government Senior Minister and First Vice President of the National Committee for Disaster Management, claimed ownership of the rescued orangutan and said that the animal had been in the care of a veterinarian. It is unclear how the MP came to possess the orangutan, but the animal had been kept at his private zoo in Kampot for two months.

¶17. Although Cambodia's Director of Forestry Administration also had confiscated two tigers from Vanda in 2000, no legal action can be expected in this case. In fact, the Forestry Administration is known to provide veterinary services and medicines to the Senator's animals upon his request.

#### More Monkey Business in Cambodia

¶18. In July 2005, Koh Kong Safari World (affiliated with Koh Kong

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Duty Free Shop in Cambodia) paid nearly 57,000 USD in fines after the Forestry Administration undertook an unprecedented prosecution and judgment against the company for illegally importing 36 orangutans from Thailand. Despite the judgment and penalty, however, the wealthy and politically-connected owner of Koh Kong Safari World has been allowed to keep the orangutans and earn profits from zoo patrons who pay to see them in kick-boxing, skateboarding, and bicycle riding shows.

¶19. Note: Koh Kong imported 22 orangutans in 2003 and another 14 in 2004. NGO sources suspect that some or all of the 36 orangutans came from Safari World in Bangkok. As evidence, they cite that Thai police first raided Bangkok's Safari World in November 2003 and found 110 orangutans. In a subsequent raid in July 2004, Thai police found only 69 animals. Safari World officials at the time claimed that the other 41 apes had died and their bodies had been cremated!

#### Comment

¶20. Wildlife trafficking is a multi-billion dollar business in Southeast Asia that not only threatens endangered species like the orangutan, but also threatens governments through its corruptive nature. Wildlife smugglers seldom go to court and rarely face jail time or significant fines. The politically connected importers of the illegal wildlife trade have even less to fear. Since ASEAN-WEN's establishment, arrests and confiscations have increased significantly, particularly in Thailand. The USG, which is already closely engaged with ASEAN-WEN, can use that organization as the means to help the countries of Southeast Asia live up to their commitment to CITES by prosecuting and penalizing the traffickers, including the procurers of smuggled animals, to the fullest extent of their laws.

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